

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05 EB-08 COME-00 TRSE-00 /082 W

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R 140800Z NOV 77

FM AMEMBASSY VICTORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0598

INFO AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L VICTORIA 0670

E.O.11652 GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINR, PROP, SE

SUBJECT: FREEDOM OF PRESS UNDER FIRE FROM SEYCHELLES' MINISTER

1. SEYCHELLES' MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND ADMINISTRATION JAMES MICHEL, IN NOVEMBER 4 RADIO ADDRESS, SAID SEYCHELLES MUST "ERADICATE...ERRONEOUS CONCEPT OF THE WESTERN SYSTEM THAT...THERE CAN EXIST INDEPENDENT OR NEUTRAL JOURNALISTS" AND DECLARED THAT REPORTERS WHO ARE NOT "COMMITTED" TO THE PEOPLE ARE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE. MICHEL ALSO CALLED ON ALL JOURNALISTS TO BECOME "COMBATANTS" IN "IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE TO LIBERATE" COUNTRY FROM "VESTIGES OF PAST SYSTEM AND IDEOLOGY." MICHEL ALSO ANNOUNCED THAT HENCEFORTH RADIO SEYCHELLES WOULD DISCONTINUE RELAY OF BBC WORLD NEWS WHICH WAS OFTEN "NOT IN CONFORMITY WITH SEYCHELLOIS ASPIRATION AND PRINCIPLES."

2. MICHEL'S STATEMENT BROUGHT QUICK RESPONSE FROM ONLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER, "WEEKEND LIFE." FOLLOWING UP ON NOVEMBER 5 EDITORIAL DEFENDING INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND FREE ENTERPRISE, WEEKLY NEWSPAPER PUBLISHED BLUNT NOVEMBER 12 ATTACK ON MICHEL'S ATTEMPT "TO DICTATE" TO THE PEOPLE AND CHALLENGED HIM TO
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RADIO DEBATE ON ROLE OF MEDIA. EMBASSY HAS LEARNED THAT PUBLICATION OF A SHARP REBUTTAL WAS ENDORSED BY PRESIDENT RENE AT NOVEMBER 10 MEETING WHICH HAD BEEN SOUGHT BY PUBLISHER, BERNARD VERLAQUE. REPORTER WHO ATTENDED MEETING TOLD CHARGE NOVEMBER 13 THAT RENE SAID MICHEL'S STATEMENT HAD NOT BEEN CLEARED WITH STATE HOUSE AND THAT NO CENSORSHIP OR POLITICAL PRESSURE WOULD BE IMPOSED ON WEEKEND LIFE SO LONG

AS HE IS IN OFFICE. RENE TRIED TO JUSTIFY MICHEL'S REMARKS
ON BASIS OF STRONG IDEOLOGICAL BENT AND "YOUTHFUL EXUBERANCE."
3. COMMENT: PRESS FREEDOM BROUHAHA COMES AT UNFORTUNATE
MOMENT FOR RENE IN HIS CONTINUING EFFORT TO ENTICE FOREIGN
INVESTORS BACK TO SEYCHELLES. IT IS ALSO ONE OF SEVERAL RECENT
INDICATIONS THAT TOO MUCH LATITUDE AND AUTHORITY MAY HAVE BEEN
GIVEN TO IDEOLOGICALLY DISPARATE GROUP WHO FORM HIS GOVERNMENT.
IN GIVING GREEN LIGHT TO WEEKEND LIFE TO TAKE MICHEL TO TASK,
RENE APPEARS TO BE SENDING SIGNAL TO MORE DOCTRINAIRE OFFICIALS
THAT THERE ARE RISKS INVOLVED IN GETTING TOO FAR OUT IN FRONT.
FINALLY, WITHIN HOURS OF SEIZING POWER ON JUNE 5, RENE
GUARANTEED FREEDOM OF PRESS AND EXPRESSION AND IT IS POSITIVE
SIGN THAT HE IS NOT BACKSLIDING ON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE.
MATTSON

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NNN

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